

News and Updates from SCDSS - September 2021

State Director's Angle
Learn Something New

By State Director Michael Leach

Each month, DSS professionals are issued a new challenge aimed at enhancing agency culture, promoting team spirit and positive professional develop. This month, we're continuing our focus on self-reflection and identifying specific opportunities to build or strengthen skills. We invite other professionals to join us in choosing one of these strategies:

1. **Read** something about the skill you want to build; this can be an educational or motivational article or book.
2. **Learn** something new! Sign up for a learning course on the skill you want to build, listen to a podcast or watch a TED Talk© or other educational video on the subject.
3. **Ask** for feedback. Approach a colleague, mentor or supervisor and ask them to give you feedback on a recent project or



communication related to the skill you want to build. Choose an activity to practice again and implement the feedback that was provided.

Sharing your progress with a manager, mentor or colleague is a great way to hold yourself accountable. When we all strive to get better at what we do individually, it makes us *Better Together!*

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES



*SCDSS Child Welfare Services has adopted the theme **Better Together: Enhancing Practice, Transforming Lives** to reflect our commitment to achieve best outcomes for the children, youth and families we serve. This means working **hand-in-hand** with families, supported by a statewide network of service providers, judicial and education partners, foster parents, the faith community and so many others who are dedicated to helping families thrive.*

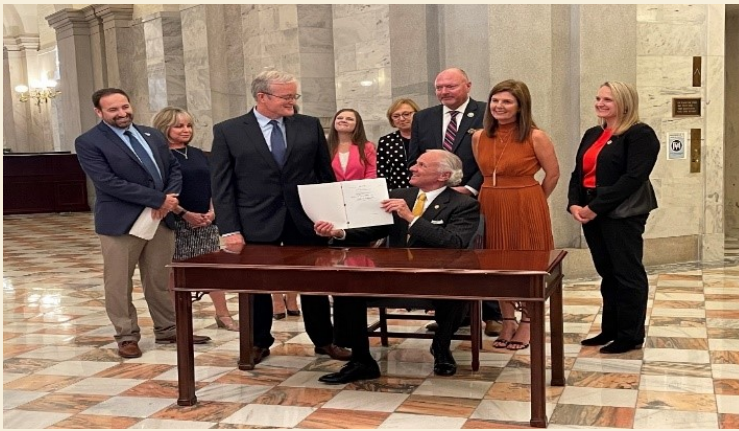
Here's a recent example of how this commitment is making a difference...

“Better Together” Means Being Family-Centered

A father involved in a child protective services case shared this note with his Family Preservation Case Manager, Sadia Robinson:

“You are a powerful gift...I feel so blessed God assigned us to you. Learning my children would be allowed back in school was an emotional moment. I know you were the energy that made this happen. Please do not say, “it is just my job.” You are so invested in your families no job description would ever do justice for the wealth of investing you do in the kids you case manage. I hope at some point in life, I can repay you. Be blessed my dear friend because you are most definitely a blessing to others.”

Another example of how we are truly **Better Together!**



New Law Helps in the Fight Against Child Abuse

On September 9th, DSS State Director Michael Leach joined Governor Henry McMaster and other leaders for the ceremonial bill signing of S.229, which is the Child Abuse Response Protocol Act. The act establishes a statewide protocol to effectively and efficiently respond to child abuse cases.

The legislation requires law enforcement or child protective services to take a victim of suspected child abuse to one of South Carolina's Child Advocacy Centers. At the center, a team of trained professionals begins the investigation and conducts a single interview specifically tailored to not retraumatize the child. Then, a multidisciplinary team of medical professionals, law enforcement, child protective services, and other professionals review the case and decide the best way to move forward.

"Child abuse and neglect is a constant issue in our state and around the country," said Director Leach. "This legislation makes sure that a child that experiences abuse will receive the same standard of how abuse allegations are handled by investigative agencies no matter where they live in the state." To see Director Leach's full comments, click [here](#).

S.229 also creates a Child Abuse Protocol Review Committee comprised of 13 members appointed by the Governor. The committee will include members with backgrounds in law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, medical, mental health, education, and victim advocacy. The committee will review the protocol on an annual basis and provide updates as needed.

September is Kinship Care Month

Governor Henry McMaster declared September as Kinship Care Month. During this month, DSS celebrates grandparents, aunts, uncles, relatives, and family friends who take in children who might otherwise go into foster care.

Kinship care refers to a temporary or permanent arrangement in which a relative or non-related adult, also known as fictive kin, has assumed full-time care of a child whose parents are unable to do so. According to the latest Kids Count data, about six percent of all children in the state live with a relative with no parent present.

"Kinship caregivers provide safe and loving homes for children when their parents are unable to remain with their parent or custodian," said DSS State Director Michael Leach. "These relatives, whether they be grandparents, aunts, uncles or other family, are an incredible support for a child or young person they love. The sacrifices they make ensure stability and we as an agency are proud to recognize and support them in any way possible." ([Click here to watch Dir. Leach's Kinship Month video.](#))

Kinship Care Month helps to increase awareness and understanding of the positive environment that kinship families offer many children in the palmetto state. For more information on kinship care, click [here](#).

**Are you raising the child of a
relative or friend?**

**As a kinship caregiver, you are
invited to a FREE event just for you!**

Kinship Caregiver Conference!



**Charleston Marriott
Charleston, SC**



**Saturday,
October 30, 2021
8:00AM-5:00PM**

Featuring



Dr. Gerald Smalls, Esq.

Raised by his grandmother in South Carolina, he is the Chair and Associate Professor of Law and Accounting of the Johnson College of Business and Economics at USC Upstate.

This Event Includes:

Free Breakfast and Lunch!

Breakout Sessions

- Family Communication
- Self-Care
- Parenting children who have experienced trauma
- Legal and custody issues

**Community Resources,
Door Prizes and more!**

*This event is for kinship caregivers only
Childcare will not be provided.

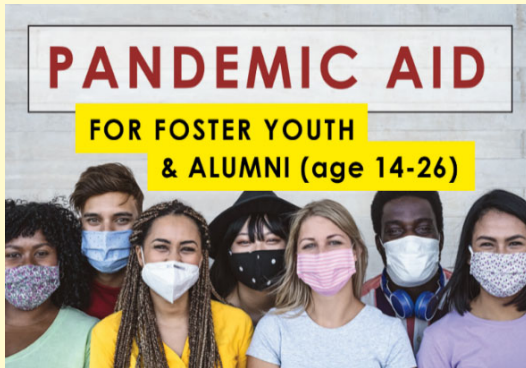


Space is limited.

Register Today!

**Call Toll-Free:
854-444-3716**

*Proof of COVID vaccination or a
negative COVID test within 72 hours
will be required to attend this event



Pandemic Aid for Youth Still Available

By Patrice White, Program Director, Chafee/ETV Program

The Consolidated Appropriations Act at the federal level supports current and former foster youth who are at least 14 years old and have not yet reached their 27th birthday with their transition into adulthood during the pandemic. ([Video message from Dir. Leach.](#))

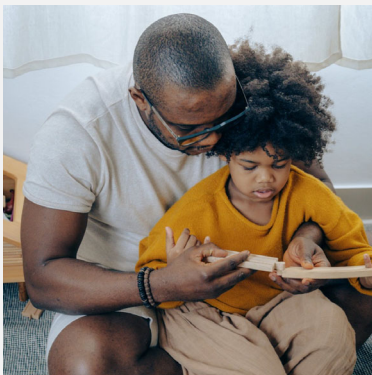
September 30, 2021 is the deadline for assisting any young person age 21 and older with obtaining these

particular funds. The Chafee/ETV program is continuing to support youth and young adults with foster care experience that have been affected by the pandemic.

Over 600 young people have already been assisted by the agency for this specific funding. Young people have received one-time stimulus payments and targeted supportive funds to stabilize academics, employment, housing, and transportation. Current and former foster youth are encouraged to reach out to IndependentLiving@dss.sc.gov.

All inquiries, assessments, applications, and processing will be done in the Chafee/ETV Unit. Every situation will be individually assessed to tailor the response and funds. Again, please note that September 30, 2021 is the deadline for assisting any young person age 21 and older with this specific pot of funding. Chafee and ETV will continue to support youth and young adults ages 18, 19, and 20 with foster care experience that have been affected by the pandemic.

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES



Child Support Awareness Highlighted

DSS promoted Child Support Awareness Month during the entire month of August to raise awareness about the need for both parents to contribute to the overall well-being of their children. On August 24th, WSPA-TV in the Upstate ran a story highlighting the success of child support collection efforts in South Carolina. The story emphasized that over \$340 million in child support was collected during the federal fiscal year 2020. That was a 13% increase compared to 2019.

Wendy Chester, the Program Coordinator for the Child Support Services Division, was interviewed. Wendy spoke on collection efforts and the recently launched [Child Support Customer Service Portal](#).

She also said the state agency established the Palmetto Automated Child Support System (PACSS) two years ago. She added, "It has standardized and automated most collection methods we have and enforcement remedies. Most effective through the pandemic were the tax offset and unemployment benefit intercept." Watch the full WSPA story [here](#).

DSS Child Support Customer Service Portal

*A secure way for parents to access
important child support case information
any time, any day.*

(Click green button above to access portal now.)

Whether paying or receiving support, parents can create a unique user ID and password to view payment information, hearing dates, enforcement measures in place, and receive occasional announcements affecting their case. The portal can also be used to update address, phone number, employment and email information.

ADULT ADVOCACY

Protection. Respect. Independence.



Click here to visit our
website to learn more
about Adult Protective
Services

Valuable Program to Assist Vulnerable Adults

*By Rick Knight, Director of Administration, Adult
Protective Services*

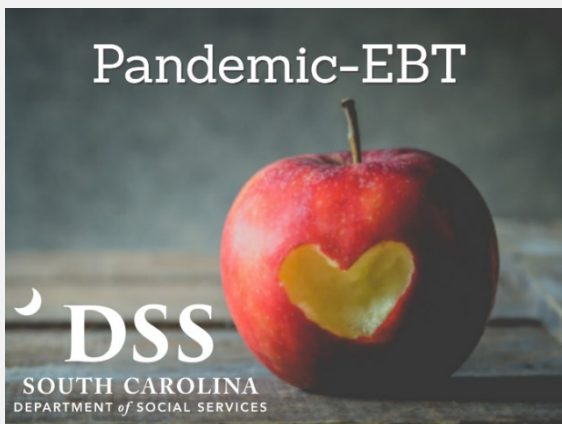
The [SCDSS Adult Protective Services division](#) is extremely excited to announce the Home Living Stabilization Program. It will allow vulnerable adults in the APS system to remain at home or return home if all they need is a modification or repair to their house or to have a utility bill paid. In one case, an adult had been removed from his home because it had no running water. This adult was placed in a living assisted facility. He was fully capable of caring for himself but had no safe place to go. The only thing he needed was to have the plumbing repaired to restore running water to his house. APS was able to have these repairs made, and now this gentleman is living happily in his home again. This case was the impetus for us to develop the Home Stabilization Living Program with federal stimulus funds APS received from the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act. So far, APS has been able to keep five adults in their homes as an alternative to placement through this program.



Protecting vulnerable adults

ECONOMIC SERVICES

Family Assistance | Early Care & Education | Employment Services



Pandemic-EBT

Summer P-EBT Rollout

Summer P-EBT has been issued for currently eligible K-12 students. Benefits were added to existing P-EBT cards beginning August 30th, 2021 and newly eligible children should receive their cards in the mail by September 30, 2021. P-EBT is an optional federal program designed to provide food benefits to children who have temporarily lost access to free and reduced-price meals at school due to school closures triggered by COVID-19. P-EBT is administered by the South Carolina Department of Social Services and the South Carolina Department of Education. All K-12 students who would have received free or reduced-price school meals at school under the National

School Lunch Program are eligible for a one-time P-EBT benefit covering the 2021 summer period.

Anyone interested in learning more can go to <https://dss.sc.gov>. To see media coverage of the P-EBT program, click [here](#).

Enhancing Opportunities for Early Childhood Educators

T.E.A.C.H. is an early childhood initiative that stands for [Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education](#). It is designed to create greater access to higher education for teachers, directors, and family child care providers who work with young children in out-of-home settings.



An estimated 2.3 million early educators in the United States work with children under the age of 5 in out-of-home settings. Statistics show the early childhood education workforce is largely female, receives poverty-level wages, and lacks the employment benefits afforded to most professions. Early educators need and may be required to attain college credits and degrees. However, early educators are challenged in their pursuit of higher education by the obstacles of money, time, location, dependent care needs, lack of incentives, and systemic barriers. The T.E.A.C.H. early childhood model allows states to address the issues of under-education, poor compensation, and high turnover in the early childhood education workforce.



Support Available for Parents and Child Care Providers

The SCDSS Division of Early Care and Education continues to offer financial assistance for child care for working families that have income at or below 300% of the federal poverty level. Information and an application for parents can be found on www.scchildcare.org under News and Announcements.

Helping Individuals Achieve Stability through Employment

The [SCDSS Division of Employment Services](#) works to support business owners who hire **SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and **TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program participants entering the workforce. When you hire our customers, you become eligible for a variety of benefits, incentives and supports designed to meet your specific needs. Hiring through DSS Employment Services programs can provide both your business and your new employee a promising future. We assist with:

- Tax credit opportunities for employers
- Workforce Consultants statewide
- Vocational assessments
- Pre-screened job referrals
- Background screening
- Ongoing assistance



Click here to view a [video](#) about how our partnership with Homes of Hope in Greenville, SC is changing lives!

DISASTER SERVICES & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT





FEMA

As Hurricane Season Continues, FEMA Announces Assistance Available

We are more than halfway through September and, thankfully, we have not suffered significant damage from any tropical storms or hurricanes this season. That does not mean we should let our guard down. Indeed, we are already more than halfway through the alphabet as Nicholas last week became the 14th named storm of the season. Please stay vigilant while watching the pattern of weather events daily.

Meanwhile, FEMA recently announced steps to reduce access barriers experienced by underserved populations to its programs that provide individual assistance to disaster survivors. They include:

- Expanding forms of documentation to prove ownership/occupancy for homeowners and renters.
- Expanding financial assistance for disaster-caused disability.
- Providing expanded housing assistance and other needs assistance funding.

Additional information on assistance available can be found [here](#).

Staying Alert and Staying Prepared

We are now three months into the 2021 Atlantic Hurricane Season. While we should pay close attention to developments all season long, September has historically been a dangerous month. Just recently, the powerful Hurricane Ida tore through Louisiana and in New Jersey leaving major damage in its wake. South Carolina was spared, but it was just one more example of why we should always be prepared.



Statistics show more than a dozen storms have made landfall in the state during the month of September. Hurricane Hugo is probably the most remembered storm to hit South Carolina. Hugo struck the night of September 21st, 1989. It made landfall near Sullivan's Island as a Category 4 hurricane with estimated maximum sustained winds of 135-140 miles per hour. Hugo's devastation is still remembered by many today.

While we hope South Carolina is spared from any storms this season, we still need to stay prepared. Below are some resources you should check regularly as we continue to navigate through the season.

Websites:

[National Hurricane Center](#)
[State Office Closures](#)
[School Closures](#)
[Power Outages](#)

Mobile Applications:

[SC Emergency Manager App \(South Carolina Updates, Planning Tools, & Shelter Status\)](#)
[American Red Cross Emergency App](#)
[FEMA \(Emergency Alerts & Planning Tools\)](#)

SCDSS Highlights



September Employees Of The Month 2021



Row 1: Will Batchelor, Director of Media Relations, State Office; Daphne Wright, Economic Services, State Office; Felicia Lucia-Beckett, Child Welfare Services, Horry; Jennifer Hawthorne, Child Support Services, Greenville

Row 2: Karen Thomas, Human Resources, State Office; Linda Valone, Adult Advocacy, Oconee; Maggie Meekins, Legal Services, Richland

DSS Recognizes September Employees of the Month

On September 28, seven DSS professionals will be recognized by Director Michael Leach as Employees of the Month.

Recognized for their hard work and leading with **Competence, Courage, and Compassion** for September are Will Batchelor, Director of Media Relations, State Office; Karen Thomas, Human Resources, State Office; Maggie Meekins, Legal Services, Richland County; Felicia Lucia, Child Welfare Services, Horry County; Daphne Wright, Economic Services, State Office; Linda Valone, Adult Advocacy, Oconee County; Jennifer Hawthorne, Child Support Services, Greenville.

The recognition celebration with Director Leach is being held virtually due to the ongoing pandemic. Each honoree has the use of a designated parking space for the entire month. They also receive a DSS lapel pin, a gift card donated by A Home for Me to be used to purchase lunch and an announcement sent to their local newspaper. Congratulations!



Bowling for a Cause

By Terri Thompson, Richland County Director

Team Richland participated in the “Cops for Kids” annual bowling event on Saturday, August 21st to raise funds for the Midlands Foundation for Foster Children. Everyone had fun striking out for a great cause!

Pictured left to right – Investigator Cynnamon Clinton (EPC Liaison with Richland County Sheriff's Dept), Gwynne Goodlett (Director Child Health and Well-Being), Harley Nelson (Family Preservation Case Manager), Anna Bristow (Foster Care Program Coordinator), Shantell Warren (Deputy Director), and Desiree Spann (Investigations Program Coordinator).

New County Director in Abbeville

Bailey Johnson is the new Abbeville County Director. She began leading the Abbeville office in her new position in July 2021.

Johnson began her career with DSS eight years ago starting in Adult Protective Services in Anderson County as a case manager. She later transferred to Economic Services in 2015, then was promoted to supervisor over the SNAP/TANF eligibility unit in 2016.

“I am so excited to be in Abbeville to support the community in whatever ways I can with my variety of program experience,” said Johnson. “I believe in our agency and that our professionals have an opportunity to make great progress and be a major impact on the communities of South Carolina. I am thrilled to be leading the team in Abbeville and will drive home our agency’s mission statement of promoting safety, permanency and well-being of children, families and vulnerable adults in all that we do.”

Johnson is originally from Anderson, S.C. and graduated from TL Hanna High School. She earned her bachelor’s degree in Psychology with an emphasis in counseling at Lander University and is currently attending Walden University to obtain a master’s degree in Public Administration. Congratulations, Bailey!



Longtime DSS Team Member Featured in Hometown Newspaper

A recently retired Economic Services Supervisor has been featured by his hometown newspaper. Irvin Smith retired August 31st after 47 years of service. Irvin was highlighted in the August 9th E-Blast. Irvin touched the lives of generations of DSS employees and clients. He has an incredible story of dedication to service.

Irvin was even recently recognized by his fellow DSS workers with a drive-by salute in the North Conway Baptist Church parking lot! The event included a proclamation declaring “Irvin Smith Day” in Conway. To read the “My Horry News” article on Irvin, click [here](#).

DSS State Director Michael Leach Honored for Outstanding Advocacy

On Sunday, September 12th, [Family Connection of South Carolina](#) held a virtual watch party for the LOOK! Photography Exhibit. The exhibit offers a look at the lives of children and young people who have a disability or chronic health condition.

As part of the virtual event, two awards were presented. Michael Leach, DSS State Director, was unanimously selected for the Pat Head Advocate of the Year award. Organizers say he was recognized for his everyday efforts to advocate for and support children as well as the extraordinary courage and compassion he exhibited during the pandemic.



"Much of my life's work has been towards advocating for the needs of others, whether that is children, youth, parents, and other clients that we serve; or whether it is advocating for our staff within the agency who work tirelessly each and every day to make sure the needs of others are met," Director Leach said. "To receive the Pat Head Advocate of the Year Award is an incredible honor and I want to thank you and Family Connection for the great work you all do to advocate on behalf of others in your work, said Director Leach. "We are grateful for the continued partnership of Family Connection and our other partners across the state and for their assistance to help us to move forward the work and accomplish our mutual goal of striving for excellence in our service to children/youth, families, and communities."

Also recognized was Tanesha Wilson who was named the Support Parent of the Year. To see the entire presentation, please click [here](#).

Partner & Community Spotlights

Providing Shoes for Children in Need

By Dena Reeves-Green, Greenville County Director

Christmas has come early at Greenville DSS. [The Christmas Shoes](#) organization has been instrumental in helping to keep our clothes closet stocked with shoes for our kids when they enter foster care and for those entering kinship care with family. They also do "special orders" for shoes if there is a need outside of our supply.

We could not do what we do for kids if it were not for our community partners!





LATE ON RENT AND UTILITIES?

AVAILABLE ASSISTANCE



This project is being supported, in whole or in part, by federal award number ER46027 awarded to the State of South Carolina by the U.S. Department of Treasury.

APPLYING TO SC STAY PLUS IS EASY



View the Application
SC Stay Plus applications open May 5th, 2021 and can be completed online!

If you have questions, please call the SC Stay Plus call center at **803-336-3420**, toll free at **1-800-476-0412**, or email us at scstayplus@schousing.com.

Updated SC Stay Plus Assistance Program

To help thousands of South Carolina residents late on their rent payments to avoid possible evictions, SC Housing has updated its SC Stay Plus emergency rental and utility assistance program. The updates make applications and approvals easier.

The SC Stay Plus program is a \$272 million federally funded program designed to help renters in 39 South Carolina counties stay safely in their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing payments directly to landlords and utility companies.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently extended a federal moratorium on evictions until October 3rd for counties still battling COVID-19 spread-which includes every county in the state.

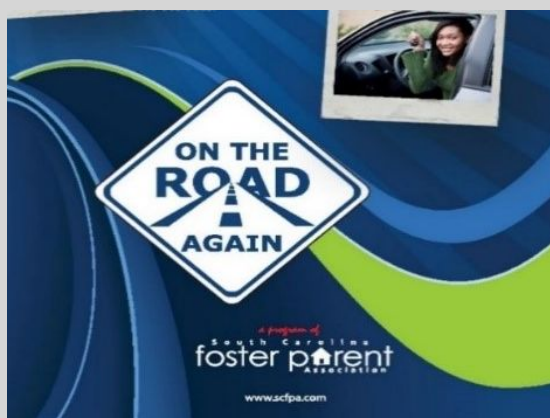
Renters who live in seven counties-Anderson, Berkeley, Charleston, Greenville, Horry, Richland, and Spartanburg- have their own programs to assist residents. Interested in learning more? Click [here](#).

On the Road Again

Do you have a used car or truck that you no longer need, but you do not think you can get much for it? Before you try to sell it or trade it in, why not consider donating it to help the [South Carolina Foster Parent Association](#)?

There is a desperate need for used vehicles and all cars donated to the ["On the Road Again" program](#) go to help deserving foster care youth.

Your donation could make a huge difference in the life of a young person who lacks transportation. They may be trying to get to school or work or need help to gain independence. To find out how you can make a lasting, positive impact, call Brian Marion at 803-665-9225.





Report abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults.



1-888-CARE4US

Click the red "Report Abuse" button to make an online report of suspected abuse and/or neglect, now!



Report Abuse

Reporters may remain anonymous or provide contact information to receive follow up on the outcome of their report.

SC Department of Social Services
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202-1520
www.DSS.sc.gov



SC Department of Social Services | P.O. Box 1520, 1535 Confederate Ave., Columbia, SC 29202

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